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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of the gender specific aspects of a child's clothing and a child's sex on the type of interaction that occurred between the child and the teacher. A stratified random sample of second graders, including urban (n=104), suburban (n=77), and rural (n=49) districts, was used, drawing on two classes from each of six school districts. Principals and teachers were told that the purpose of the study was to observe children's clothing practices and their interactions during class. No mention was made concerning the teacher's interaction with the child. Sex and gender aspects of clothing were found to be related to teacher student interaction. Male and female children who were dressed in a unisex manner were the most likely to experience positive interaction while those dressed in the most gender specific manner were the most likely to experience reproof. In keeping with the findings of previous studies, male students rated significantly higher than female students in interaction with their teacher. (Contains 2 tables and 17 references.) (BT)

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Gender Specific Aspects of Children's Clothing and Teacher-Student Interaction

Abstract

The study examined the effect of the gender specific aspects of child's clothing and the child's gender on the type of interaction which occurred between the child and the teacher. Both gender and clothing were found to be related to teacher student interaction. Male and female children who were dressed in a unisex manner were the most likely to experience positive interaction while those dressed in the most gender specific manner were the most likely to experience reproof. In keeping with the findings of previous studies male students were significantly higher in interaction with their teacher than were female students.

Key Words: teacher-student interaction, gendered clothing, perception.

Clothing has a significant influence on the manner in which we are perceived by others. Perception of appearance is central to the evaluation of abilities, personality, traits, and activities by other people. How teachers perceive students and form expectations of their capabilities and potential can have a major influence on a child's subsequent development. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between gender specific aspects of the child's clothing and the nature of interaction which occurred between the child and the teacher.

This research builds on well documented research findings that teachers treat male and female students differently. Boys receive more attention, detailed instruction, educational opportunities to succeed, and praise than girls (Serbin, O'Leary, Kent, and Tonick, 1973). Brophy and Good (1970) found evidence of differential behavior by teachers toward

students which could not be objectively attributed to student differences. They suggested that differences were related to teacher expectations. Other researchers, Behling and Williams (1991), found that perception of a model's dress in photographs was significantly related to assessment of intelligence. This research was important to increased understanding of assessment of student abilities because it addressed variation in assessment of intelligence based on dress rather than on gender or other demographic characteristics. Researchers have indicated that the expectations which teachers have for male students have a significant affect on their academic performance and long range career success and that limited interaction negatively affects female students' learning opportunities (Clarken, 1995). Better understanding of this gender based stereotypical reaction by teachers can be significant in the education of teachers to become less stereotypical in their attitudes and behavior toward students. The primary objective of this study was to increase knowledge of the impact of the child's clothing as related to classroom interaction.

Previous work has relied on the use of photographs of high school age models rather than students in a classroom situation. Clothing is an important cue in person perception and is influential in determining interaction between people. The interaction which young children experience in the classroom influences their future academic success. If the clothing which the child is wearing affects this interaction, educators need to be aware. Considerable attention has been given to the influence of gender on teacher student interaction and school districts have implemented programs to help teachers become more gender equitable in their instruction. Increased understanding of the language of clothing can further assist teachers in effectively working with all children.

Clothing and Teacher Student Interaction

Behling and Williams (1991), in examining the relationship between perception and intelligence, academic achievement and clothing style, found significant differences in perception of intelligence and scholastic ability based on clothing styles and gender of models shown in photographs. When models wearing four different clothing styles were shown to teachers, male models were perceived as more intelligent and to have higher academic achievement than female models regardless of the clothing style shown. Several other studies, using a variety of age groups, have demonstrated that appearance is related to differences in expectations for behavior (Cahill, 1989; Joffe, 1971; & Kaiser, 1989).

Johnson and Workman (1993) studied impressions of preschool children's competencies and likelihood that the children would engage in sex-typed behaviors. Female children were more likely to be encouraged to play with dolls or play house when they were dressed in clothing which the author's classed as feminine while female children dressed in jeans and t-shirts were more likely to be encouraged to play with blocks and other non-gender associated play activities. Teachers who held sex-role stereotypes were more likely to encourage girls to engage in feminine activities than teachers who did not hold sex-role stereotypes.

Gender and Teacher-Student Interaction

Research in the area of gender-equity has shown that expectations are different for boys and girls. Teachers treat children differently on the basis of gender and are not aware of doing so; teachers have been found to give male students longer to answer questions and to be more affirming of the response than they are of female students (Adams, 1978; Fagot, 1981;

& Sadker and Sadker, 1972). Teachers interact more frequently with male students and to have higher expectations for their intellectual capabilities (Behling and Williams, 1991). Higher quality interaction has been observed with students from whom teachers have higher expectations (Sadker and Sadker, 1994). The gender of the child is of paramount influence on the nature of teacher student interaction (Serbin, O'Leary, Kent, and Tonick, 1973).

Research by Feldhusen and Willard-Holt (1993) indicated that bright boys ask more questions than bright girls. However, teachers were not found to reprimand bright girls from calling out answers. These findings were contrary to the findings of Callahan (1980) indicating that girls are encouraged to more docile behavior than boys.

In a study of children's day care experiences, Clawson (1997) found that boys receive more control interactions than girls but that girls receive more overall interactions. She suggested that boys were more likely to behave in ways which elicited controlling behavior. This finding is contrary to earlier studies indicating that boys experienced more total interaction than girls (Sadker and Sadker, 1972).

Based on the review of literature, the researcher hypothesized that both the gender of the child and the gender characteristics of the child's clothing would affect the type of interaction which occurs

Sample Selection and Profile

Second grade children were selected because previous research on clothing as related to teacher perception of student capabilities was done with high school age students. If clothing affects teacher's assessment of high school student capabilities and potential, it is important to examine the potential affect of clothing for other age groups as well.

A stratified random sample, to include urban, suburban, and rural districts, was used which included two classes from each of six school districts. All children who were present the day of the observation were included in the study. One hundred four (45%) of the participants were from urban schools, 77 (33%) came from suburban schools and 49 (21%) from a rural school district. One hundred nineteen of the participants were male (52%) and 111 (48%) were female. In terms of race 73% were Caucasian, 19% were African American, 6% were Asian, and 2% were Hispanic.

Data Collection

Principals and teachers were told that the purpose of the study was to observe children's clothing practices and their interaction during a regular class period. No mention was made to the principal or the teacher concerning the teacher's interaction with the child.

Each classroom was observed one time for a total of two minutes per child in the class. Observation time was controlled to allow equal observation time for classrooms differing in class size. Most classes included twenty children and consequently were observed for a total of forty minutes.

The graduate students requested a class list upon arrival, prepared name tags for the students and recorded the student's names on the observation forms. One graduate student recorded the gender specific aspects of the child's clothing, the child's gender, and the child's perceived ethnicity while the second graduate student recorded interaction between the child and the teacher. One graduate student always categorized the child's clothing while the other recorded the teacher child interaction.

Measurement of Variables

Clothing. The gender specific characteristics of the child's clothing was classified into four categories: unisex, minimally gender specific, moderately gender specific, and extremely gender specific.

Categories of clothing were defined by the researchers following exploratory observation and discussion of the type of clothing customarily worn by school age children. Preliminary observation indicated that most children wear clothing with few gender designations. A list of style features which were observed on children's clothing was developed and those which applied to one gender and not the other were listed as gender specific.

Clothing and adornment classed as unisex included items which by virtue of color and/or style could appropriately be worn by either gender in our society at this point in time. Clothing such as sweaters, t-shirts and blue jeans were considered to be Unisex. Minimally gender specific clothing were outfits with one gender specific item or decorative detail which made the clothing more appropriate for one gender. For female children peter pan collars, the color pink, ruffles, lace, tucks, shirring, ribbons, skirts, Mary Jane shoes, tights, etc. were considered to be feminine items of clothing. For male children military fatigues, sports team logo apparel, rough, heavy fabrics, plaid flannel shirts, heavy work boots, dark intense colors, etc. were classified as masculine.

The moderately gender specific clothing included wearing clothing or adornment which included two to three gender specific items, and the extreme gender specific clothing category included wearing of four or more items which would not generally be worn by members of the opposite sex.

Teacher-student Interaction. Interaction included all interchange, verbal and physical, between the teacher and the child whether it be of a positive, neutral or negative nature. Positive interaction included all

exchanges which reflected a favorable attitude on the part of the teacher including responses to questions, questioning the child, giving information, giving verbal and/or physical comfort, or aiding in an activity. Positive interactions were helpful, instructive, encouraging, and positive in manner. Interactions which were neutral in nature was recorded as positive because the child was recognized and given attention. Negative interactions with the child, reproof, were classified as interactions in which the teacher's attitude was negative, ignoring, reprimanding, or critical of the child. Total interaction was the combination of positive interaction and reproof.

Results

Total Interaction.

The relationship found between total teacher child interaction and the gendered aspects of the child's clothing was not statistically significant, F[3,226]=1.632. Table I reports the relationship between the teacher child interaction and the child's clothing. Analysis of variance on total interaction indicated the main effect to be the gender of the child, F[1,228]=9.937***. Male children (M=4.487, SD=3.427) experienced significantly more total interaction than female children (M=3.189, SD=2.755).

Positive Interaction.

Gender was also found to be the main effect on positive interaction, F[1,205]=5.389**. Boys (M=4.125, SD=2.929) were more likely to interact positively with their teachers than were girls (M=3.274, SD=2.224).

The gender specific aspect of the child's clothing was also found to be significantly related to positive interaction, F[3,203]=2.764*. Children dressed in a unisex manner (M=4.560, SD=3.315) had higher levels of positive interaction than those dressed in minimum gender (M=3.762,

SD=2.570), moderate gender (M=3.192, SD=2.145), or extreme gender (M=3.688, SD=2.522) clothing. Fisher's PLSD tests indicated that children dressed in a unisex manner experienced significantly more positive interaction than those dressed in a moderate gender manner. See Table I.

Analysis of males only (Table II) indicated that clothing tended to be related, F[3,108]=2.547, to positive interaction. Boys dressed in a unisex manner (M=4.765, SD=3.267) were more likely to interact positively with their teacher than those dressed in either a moderate (M=3.190, SD=2.350) or minimum (M=4.742, SD=2.966) gender manner when examined using Fisher's PLSD test. For female children no significant relationships were found between positive interaction and the gendered aspects of their clothing, F[3,91]=1.369.

Reproof.

The child's clothing was significantly related to the level of reproof which they experienced, F (3,65)=3.280*. Children dressed in an extremely gender (M=2.714, SD=1.254) specific manner were the most likely to receive reproof while those dressed in a unisex (M=1.385, SD=.650) manner were least likely. Fisher's PLSD test indicated that children dressed in an extremely gender specific manner received significantly more reproof than children dressed in a unisex, minimum, or moderately gender specific manner. See Table I.

Analysis of female children only indicated that girls wearing extremely (M=3.667, SD=1.155) gendered clothing experienced reproof significantly more often, F(3,19)=3.852*, than those wearing unisex (M=2.000, SD=1.414), minimally gendered (M=1.727, SD=1.191), or moderately gendered (M=1.286, SD=.488) clothing, . Among male children gender specific clothing was not significantly, F(3,42)=.791, related to level of reproof. However, for both male and female children, the highest levels

of reproof were experienced by those wearing extremely gendered clothing.

Discussion

The findings of the study support the hypothesis that teacher student interaction and clothing are related. This finding is consistent with the findings of other researchers that teachers interact with children differently. Previous research has indicated that differences in interaction are significantly related to gender of the child (Baker, 1986; Feldhusen and Willard Holt, 1993; Jones and Wheatly, 1990). Other research has shown that expectations for play behavior are related to type of clothing worn (Johnson and Workman, 1993). Findings of this study indicate that differences in behavior on the part of the teacher are related not only to gender but also related to the type of clothing worn.

The dominant characteristic in explaining why teachers react more to some children than others is their gender. However, findings indicated that children who dressed in extremely gendered clothing such as military fatigues for boys or ruffles for girls were more likely to be subject to reproof than children dressed in unisex or minimally gendered clothing.

Children dress in a manner which is expressive of their values, interest, personality. They are showing others who they are. Of course, the type of clothing which children wear is influenced by the parents/guardians, siblings, and peers. For second grade children the influence of family is stronger than the influence of peers. What children choose to wear is a combination of what is available, what they are allowed to wear, and what they want to wear. The child expresses about him/her self through their clothing. Does the little girl in the frilly dress have a different self concept than the little girl in jeans and a sweat shirt? Does the manner of dress impact how children act individually or in groups?

Some educators feel that clothing affects classroom behavior and institute rules to control perceived negative aspects of appearance.

This study was concerned with how the teacher reacted to the child related to the child's appearance. It is not possible to separate the intervening variables of gender, the teacher's previous experience with the child, and the child's expression of self through clothing. Does the teacher react differently to children because of the way they look?

Additional research is needed on characteristics of the child which influence clothing choices and the type of gender equity training the teacher may have experienced. Children dressed in unisex clothing received the most total and positive interaction while children dressed in extremely gendered clothing experienced significantly more reproof. Perhaps the teacher felt that their clothing was inappropriate or their clothing may have been an attention getting device. No information was collected which examined the selection process related to the child's clothing.

Clothing influences the perception which others have of a child's personality, capabilities, potential. This study indicates that teachers interact with children differently based on their clothing. Because the expectations of teachers in their interaction with children has been shown to be critical to the educational experience of the child, the finding that teacher's interaction is related to the gender specific aspects of the child's clothing is critical in further understanding of the dynamics of teacher student interaction.

Table I. ANOVA for Teacher Student Interaction as Related to Child's Clothing and Gender. n=230

	Interaction					
	Total		Positive		Reproof	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Clothing						
Unisex	4.556	3.790	4.560	3.315	1.385	.650
Minimum Gender	3.875	3.189	3.762	2.570	1.750	1.189
Moderate Gender	3.353	2.599	3.192	2.145	1.440	.917
Extreme Gender	4.105	3.478	3.688	2.522	2.714	1.254
F	1.632		2.764*		3.280*	
Gender						
male	4.487	3.427	4.125	2.929	1.565	.981
female	3.189	2.755	3.274	2.224	1.870	1.217
F	9.937***		5.389**		1.254	

*p≤.05, **p≤.01, ***p≤.001

Table II. ANOVA for Type of Teacher Student Interaction as Related to Child's Gender and Clothing. n=230

	Total Interaction			
	Male		Female	
Clothing	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Unisex	5.029	3.626	3.684	4.028
Minimum Gender	5.152	3.615	2.795	2.319
Moderate Gender	3.659	2.877	3.024	2.253
Extreme Gender	3.857	4.220	4.250	3.166
F	1.668		1.116	

	Positive Interaction			
	Male		Female	
Clothing	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Unisex	4.765	3.267	4.125	3.481
Minimum Gender	4.742	2.966	2.812	1.674
Moderate Gender	3.190	2.350	3.194	1.910
Extreme Gender	3.800	3.421	3.636	2.203
F	2.547		1.369	

	Reproof Interaction			
	Male		Female	
Clothing	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Unisex	1.273	.467	2.000	1.414
Minimum Gender	1.769	1.235	1.727	1.191
Moderate Gender	1.500	1.043	1.286	.488
Extreme Gender	2.000	.816	3.667	1.155
F	.791		3.852*	

*p≤.05, **p≤.01, ***p≤.001

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